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**Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children**

**Promotion and protection of the rights of the child**

# Follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly on children

## Report of the Secretary-General

*Summary*

The present report has been prepared in response to the request of the General Assembly to the Secretary-General, in its resolution 59/261 of 23 December 2004, to prepare an updated report on progress achieved in realizing the commitments set out in the final document of the twenty-seventh special session of the Assembly, entitled "A world fit for children", with a view to identifying new challenges and making recommendations on actions needed to achieve further progress.

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# I. Introduction

1. The present report is the third update of progress made in follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly on children, which was held from 8 to 10 May 2002. The first report (A/58/333) was presented at the fifty-eighth session and the second (A/59/274) at the fifty-ninth session.

2. At the historic session of the Assembly devoted exclusively to children, delegations from 190 countries adopted the Declaration and Plan of Action set out in the document entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex). That document committed Governments to a time-bound set of goals for children and young people, with a particular focus on (a) promoting healthy lives; (b) providing quality education; (c) protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence; and (d) combating the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS).

3. Delegates also committed their Governments to a framework for moving forward, which included the following:

(a) Developing or strengthening action plans for children, including specific goals and targets, by the end of 2003, with wide involvement of civil society, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and children;

(b) Strengthening national planning, coordination, implementation and resource allocation for children and integrating the international goals of "A world fit for children" into national policies and plans;

(c) Establishing or strengthening national bodies for the promotion and protection of children's rights;

(d) Regular monitoring of the situation of children at the national level and periodic reviews of progress towards the fulfilment of the global agenda.

4. As stated in previous reports, the four major goal areas of "A world fit for children" strongly reinforce the United Nations Millennium Declaration (General Assembly resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000) and the Millennium Development Goals, of which seven directly address and affect the rights of children. It was clearly recognized that the building of a world fit for children would be a major step in fulfilling the commitments of the Millennium Summit of 2000.

5. Implementation of the commitments of the special session on children is taking place in the context of coordinated follow-up to the other major international conferences and summits. Notable among them are the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the International Conference on Financing for Development, both held in 2002. The goals of "A world fit for children" are also firmly grounded in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (resolution S-26/2, annex), adopted at the twenty-sixth special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS.

6. The agenda of "A world fit for children" forms part of the international efforts to ensure truly sustained development and to mobilize additional resources for this purpose, owing to the very high potential impact of effective investments in the survival, health, education and protection of children for broad-based poverty reduction and socio-economic progress.

# II. Progress in follow-up to the special session on children

## A. Global trends in the follow-up process

7. A year ago it was clear that, while many countries had taken concrete actions to translate the commitments made at the 2002 special session into national actions plans for children or to integrate them into other national policies and planning processes, the overall rate of progress had been uneven. The global picture is now more encouraging.

8. Information received by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as of May 2005 indicates that 41 countries have completed national plans of action for children since the special session and that an additional 45 national plans for children are under formulation. A further 14 countries foresee the development of such a plan. Some 14 countries had already developed national plans for children near the beginning of the decade, and several of them are under revision.

9. In addition, as envisaged by the special session, many countries have chosen to incorporate the goals and commitments of "A world fit for children" into other national policy and planning instruments, such as poverty reduction strategies, national development plans and sector plans, including sector-wide approaches. Some 145 countries have used one or more of the instruments for their follow-up activities. Of those, some 61 countries are using poverty reduction strategies as a primary method for pursuing their national goals for children; 24 countries are using national development plans; and 60 countries are using mainly sectoral or cross-sectoral plans.

10. In all, at least 172 countries have either taken or foresee taking some form of action to put the goals of the special session on children into operation. Priority issues for children are thus being increasingly reflected in mainstream national planning processes. Many countries have also launched more specific initiatives in the priority areas of the Plan of Action of "A world fit for children" or are reviewing relevant national legislation in order to achieve greater consistency with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

11. Many Governments used a broadly consultative process for developing plans of action for children and other responses. In most cases, inputs were obtained from a range of government ministries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), agencies and organizations of the United Nations, parliamentary representatives and local government authorities. Involvement of children and young people in the preparation of national plans of action for children and sectoral plans in child-related areas has also increased since the special session. Children and young people played substantial roles in the preparation of a majority of the national plans of action for children prepared in 2004. There is scope for more active participation of children and young people in the preparation of poverty reduction strategies.

12. In some cases, however, the follow-up process was slowed by external factors, including political instability, armed conflict and other crises. Nonetheless, some Governments faced with those problems have recognized the potential of the goals of "A world fit for children" and of the Millennium Development Goals to provide a unifying agenda in the process of social recovery.

## B. Progress and trends among regions

13. Regions have pursued the follow-up to the special session on children at different speeds and have shown different preferences with regard to the best way to proceed. Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States have made outstanding progress in the initial planning phase. Almost all countries in the region have completed follow-up plans or are well advanced in doing so.

14. Both Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia have made widespread efforts since the special session on children. In Latin America and the Caribbean, there has been a major focus on developing new national plans for children or revising existing ones. Countries in South Asia and in East Asia and the Pacific have used a wider range of instruments, including national development plans, poverty reduction strategies and sectoral plans.

15. Of 35 industrialized countries at the special session, some 21 have developed or are preparing national plans of action for children, and 6 are following up through sectoral plans. Many of those countries have undertaken consultations and media initiatives with the general public, often with the support of civil society organizations and in collaboration with the national committees for UNICEF. Some industrialized countries are also seeking to reflect the commitments of the special session on children through their official development assistance.

16. In sub-Saharan Africa, some 35 countries have opted to integrate the goals of the special session on children into their poverty reduction strategies. In addition, some 18 countries have developed or intend to develop a national plan of action or policy paper on children. A number of countries are complementing their poverty reduction plans with specific policies and programmes on such issues as orphan care and protection, girls' education, prevention of child trafficking and the reform of juvenile justice.

17. Progress was also recorded in the Middle East and North Africa, though at a more limited pace. Ten countries in the region have developed or intend to develop a national plan of action or policy paper on children; 8 countries are integrating efforts for children into their national development plans or poverty reduction strategies; and 6 are developing sectoral plans relevant to the goals of the special session on children.

## C. The role of regional mechanisms

18. In every region, Governments have continued to use intergovernmental mechanisms to follow up on the special session.

19. The second Intergovernmental Conference on Children in Europe and Central Asia, which was held in Sarajevo in May, 2004, has resulted in an increased focus on protection issues, including violence against children. The regional consultation for the United Nations Study on Violence against Children, which took place in Slovenia in July 2005, considered violence in the various settings where it occurs. The Sarajevo conference has further stimulated national review and planning on children's rights. A fourth regional meeting of NGO coalitions in Europe was held in

March 2005, focusing on children's rights in Europe, including the development of plans of action and advocacy with the European Union.

20. The African Union held a special summit in Ouagadougou in September 2004, in which 18 Heads of State participated to discuss poverty reduction efforts. A declaration was adopted, with an action plan that included increased support for programmes in the areas of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. At the subregional level, a unit was established within the Secretariat of the Economic Community of Western African States to strengthen the monitoring of the annual peer review of progress towards the commitments made at the special session and other international conferences.

21. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the sixth Ibero-American ministerial meeting on children and adolescents, held in Costa Rica, focused on the protection of children from violence and other forms of exploitation. The Ministers called for intensified efforts to prevent and combat violence and exploitation of children and asked for the establishment of a system to monitor progress towards achievement of the goals for children. At the Ibero-American summit, the leaders issued a declaration on education, including a call for "debt-for-education" sector plans.

22. In South Asia, a network of statistical bureaus was established in 2004 to monitor the Millennium Development Goals related to children. The network will explore monitoring the millennium and special session commitments in 2005. In East Asia and the Pacific, countries are tracking progress in achieving the commitments of the Bali Consensus, which lists focus areas for regional cooperation, recommends partnerships and identifies principles of action for realizing the global commitments. The seventh East Asia and Pacific Ministerial Consultation on Children was held in March 2005 and promoted greater commitment by 26 Governments to improve the lives of the region's children.

23. The Arab Parliamentary Union hosted the first Arab parliamentarian conference on child protection in Amman in November 2004, with the collaboration of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNICEF. A declaration was adopted, calling for all Arab parliaments and consultative councils to consider establishing a national parliamentarian committee on children's rights as an oversight mechanism for all parliamentary work related to children. The Declaration also highlighted a range of specific actions that could be undertaken to strengthen the protection of children and their rights. The Arab Parliamentary Union was requested to organize a regional meeting every two years to take stock of progress.

24. Throughout all regions, coalitions and networks of religious leaders, children's rights groups, development NGOs, women's organizations, professional associations, United Nations and other organizations continue to follow up on the goals of the special session, helping to keep them high on the political agenda and contributing to their implementation. The Global Movement for Children, launched in conjunction with the special session, organized the "Lesson for Life" initiative, which mobilized 4 million children and adults in 67 countries to discuss HIV/AIDS and its impact on children on the occasion of World AIDS Day. This provided children with the opportunity to hold discussions with policymakers and contribute to national HIV/AIDS action plans.

## D. Strengths and weaknesses in the follow-up process

25. **Coverage of major goal areas**. The Plan of Action of the special session emphasizes the importance of monitoring progress towards the established goals, which have provided guidance for the preparation of national plans. All the national plans of action for children prepared in 2004 address in specific terms the four areas of the Plan of Action. Other national plans — poverty reduction strategies and national development plans — refer to measures already undertaken by Governments to track the realization of the goals, including improvement of statistical systems and assessment of plan implementation. However, few of the poverty reduction strategies give significant focus to child protection issues, and many place only limited emphasis on early childhood development.

26. **Participation of civil society in the follow-up process**. Civil society is frequently involved in the preparation of plans, but less so in their implementation, monitoring and review. The preparation of poverty reduction strategies and national development plans has often involved trade unions, parliamentarians and the private sector, while the national plans of action for children have more often involved children and young people, through task forces, polls or children's parliaments. However, it appears that in many countries that are now in the implementation phase, the levels of participation have not been fully maintained.

27. **Meaningful participation of children**. The special session increased the momentum for the participation of children in national decision-making. The participation of children and young people in the preparation of national plans and in specific initiatives such as back-to-school or immunization campaigns has since increased. However, much more advocacy is needed for their participation in the full cycle of national planning.

28. **Planning for children at the subnational level**. Decentralization reforms in many countries are providing opportunities for supporting children at subnational levels. The process of developing child-related goals at the provincial and municipal levels has been completed in several countries, based on local assessments and participatory planning. There is growing recognition of the benefits of addressing challenges that children face at decentralized levels of Government, where community ownership can more readily be fostered.

29. **Provisions to reach the most disadvantaged groups**. The majority of plans and policies include approaches that focus specifically on the most disadvantaged groups. The national plans of action for children tend to address the needs of disadvantaged children more explicitly than other instruments. In most cases, the generation of data to support programmes specifically oriented to disadvantaged families and children remains a challenge.

30. **Convergence in planning for child-related goals**. The strong focus of the United Nations Millennium Declaration on the lives of children has created a positive synergy with the goals of "A world fit for children" and has led to the convergence of national planning processes around a common set of goals. Many national plans refer to both. The fact that the Millennium Development Goals benefit from widespread support from agencies whose mandate is not specifically for children means that issues relating to children are now high on the international agenda. The special session goals, for their part, provide greater specificity and also encompass the crucial area of child protection, which is not directly addressed by

the Goals. Nevertheless, the impact of that convergence on programmes should be carefully monitored to ensure that it does not result in decreased visibility for children's issues.

31. **Budget allocations to meet the goals**. Several countries are mobilizing additional resources and protecting expenditures for the four areas identified in the Plan of Action of "A world fit for children". Poverty reduction strategies and national development plans have been useful instruments in mobilizing resources. However, few of the national plans of action for children have well-developed budget information. Efforts are needed to strengthen the link between national plans of action and national budgets.

32. **Increased attention to the Convention on the Rights of the Child**. The majority of the national plans of action for children make reference to the Convention or to the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the respective country reports. Other human rights instruments, such as International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 138 concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, and the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, are also increasingly recognized as part of the framework for national plans of action. Almost all the national plans of action on children prepared since the special session anticipate the need to review national legislation in relation to the provisions of the Convention. A number also propose strategies to increase the attention given to the views of children. In addition, poverty reduction strategies are increasingly taking into account elements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## E. Strengthening of monitoring mechanisms for child goals

33. The Plan of Action of "A world fit for children" emphasizes the importance of monitoring progress towards the adopted goals. Many countries that are implementing poverty reduction strategies or national development plans have established rigorous monitoring mechanisms, often coordinated by the central finance or planning ministry. Poverty reduction strategies normally include provisions for the involvement of major stakeholders in annual assessments and for public progress reports.

34. The mechanisms foreseen in the national plans of action for children are more variable. Some do not include a central monitoring mechanism, while in others, the body that was entrusted with the preparatory process is also responsible for monitoring and annual reporting. Many of the plans of action recognize reporting obligations to the general public and see civil society organizations as partners in monitoring progress. However, such participation in monitoring has not yet been widely institutionalized.

35. The concern for strengthening national statistical capacity, recognized in the Plan of Action, is reflected in many of the national plans for children. This includes heightened attention to disaggregated data. While many countries have well-established systems for monitoring trends related to health and education, data availability remains weak in the area of child protection.

36. The impetus behind the goals of the special session, combined with the broad international focus on the goals contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, has led to improvement of national monitoring systems. Many countries have moved towards unified data collection and monitoring systems for these international goals. The organizations and agencies of the United Nations and other international actors continue to collaborate in supporting a consolidated system of data collection, monitoring the goals and reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

37. Some 44 countries have adopted the *DevInfo* database system for compiling and presenting child-related data and data on the goals contained in the Millennium Declaration. United Nations agencies have made major efforts to support national capacity for regular reporting on the goals and, in some countries, to strengthen information systems on child-related goals at the subnational level. The various data collection and analysis systems will be used to generate information for reports on progress towards the goals of the Millennium Declaration and of "A world fit for children".

38. A response related to the monitoring of child-related goals has been the widespread national reporting in the last few years on the Millennium Development Goals. As of July 2005, at least 102 countries had issued monitoring reports on the Goals.

39. UNICEF and other agencies are supporting a new round of Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) that will provide the largest single source of data for reporting on progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and the goals of "A world fit for children". Comparable child-related data will also be produced by Demographic and Health Surveys. Nearly 90 countries will be engaged in household surveys during 2005 and early 2006. The surveys will provide a rich source of data for reporting to the commemorative plenary meeting in 2007 on the special session on children, on a date to be decided by the General Assembly at its sixtieth session (resolution 58/282, para. 8). It will also assist in closing some of the major gaps in information in such areas as child protection.

40. Since the special session on children, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has discussed the status of follow-up with reporting countries, and its concluding observations include comments on the oral responses of Governments on the issue. There are indications that countries preparing reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2005 and beyond will incorporate an assessment of progress in following up on the commitments of the special session.

# III. Progress in the four major areas of "A world fit for children"

## A. Promoting healthy lives

41. Of the 10.8 million children that die each year, 6 million fall victim to diseases that could be prevented or effectively treated. The high-impact, cost-effective interventions needed to substantially reduce under-five mortality are available, but remain beyond the reach of many of the families who need them most. Other

actions — such as proper infant feeding and breastfeeding — are still not practised by many families.

42. According to the child health goals of "A world fit for children" and the Millennium Development Goals, infant and under-five mortality are to be reduced by two thirds by 2015. At present, only a small proportion of countries are on track to attain these goals, and most regions are in danger of falling short if efforts are not stepped up. In support of acceleration towards the goals, the international community is launching a renewed partnership effort for child survival, including the Global Immunization Vision and Strategy for 2006-2015 prepared by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF with other partners.

43. In recent years, routine immunization has consistently benefited about three quarters of the world's children. Current strategies, using a mix of routine services and accelerated disease-control programmes, have contributed significantly to child survival, averted an estimated 2.5 million deaths every year and prevented countless episodes of illness and disability. Still, over 29 million children, mainly in disadvantaged communities, are not reached by routine immunization. By 2003, coverage had increased to 76 per cent in developing countries, from 73 per cent in 2001. The Global Immunization Vision and Strategy includes recommendations for a set of mutually reinforcing strategies to close the remaining gaps in coverage.

44. International partnerships have helped to spur the reduction of measles. During the period 2001-2004, about 200 million additional children were vaccinated in sub-Saharan Africa, reducing measles deaths to fewer than 240,000 in 2004. Meanwhile, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative saw an almost 50-per-cent decline in the number of reported cases in 2004 in Asia. However, setbacks occurred in Africa, and the global number of reported polio cases increased to more than 1,200, compared to 784 in 2003. Most countries continue to implement supplementary immunization activities for both polio eradication and measles control. Nevertheless, there is a critical need to strengthen routine immunization services in order to sustain the gains achieved.

45. Of the 58 countries still seeking to eliminate maternal and neonatal tetanus, 33 have initiated or expanded supplemental immunization activities for tetanus toxoid in high-risk districts over the past four years, protecting almost 46 million women. Elimination efforts have significantly reduced the number of annual neonatal tetanus deaths. However, uncertainty about future funding continues to jeopardize the attainment of this goal.

46. Efforts to improve maternal health include the strengthening of referral systems and the inclusion of emergency obstetrical care as a priority programme in national poverty reduction strategies. However, despite intensified efforts in some countries, notably in parts of Asia and Latin America, safe motherhood initiatives still tend to suffer from a shortage of resources and a lack of adequate attention.

47. The Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses initiative is a major effort for the convergent delivery of services for child survival, growth and development. West African countries have piloted a complementary initiative for Accelerated Child Survival and Development. Those initiatives, in over 90 countries, have supported expanded coverage of high-impact health and nutrition interventions to address major causes of child death.

48. The use of insecticide treated nets to combat malaria has expanded in some 35 African countries as well as in parts of Asia and the Pacific, with a focus on promoting access among the groups most at risk. The scaling up of coverage remains a challenge, and the rates of re-treatment of the nets with the recommended insecticide remain very low in many affected countries. Long-lasting nets have now been developed, and the partners in the Roll Back Malaria initiative are working to increase both production capacity and demand. UNICEF, WHO and other partners also supported the introduction of artemisinin-based combination therapy for malaria in a number of countries during 2004.

49. The prevention of anaemia is increasingly recognized as vital to women's health and to the intellectual development of infants and young children. Food fortification and iron supplementation are widely ranked among the most cost-effective interventions for poverty reduction. The current approach of providing iron-folate supplements during pregnancy has had limited impact on anaemia rates during pregnancy, owing to problems in distribution. Efforts are needed to scale up food fortification in many countries.

50. Iodine deficiency disorders are the most widespread cause of preventable mental retardation among children. An alliance of United Nations agencies, Governments, business, donors and NGOs is leading a successful campaign for universal salt iodization. As a result, some 54 countries faced iodine deficiency as a public health problem in 2003, down from 110 in 1993.

51. Up to 40 per cent of child deaths could be prevented with improved family care. Some 94 countries have now developed a set of recommended family and community practices to promote child survival, growth and development. Meanwhile, the number of countries with a national policy on early childhood development increased from 17 in 2002 to 34 in 2004. As a result, child development and family issues have been incorporated more fully in national programmes.

52. More than two thirds of the children in the least developed countries received vitamin A supplements in 2004. Despite the reduced use of National Immunization Days, vitamin A supplementation coverage remained steady. Most countries now have alternative strategies in place. Some 21 countries achieved over 70-per-cent coverage of children under five years of age with two rounds of supplementation. Measles vaccinations and vitamin A supplementation have also been prioritized as life-saving interventions in a number of recent emergency and post-conflict situations.

53. Revised United Nations inter-agency guidelines have emphasized the need to assist HIV-positive mothers in selecting the most appropriate infant feeding options while reducing the risk of child mortality and increasing support for breastfeeding among the general population. The introduction of the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding has refocused efforts, including the baby-friendly hospital initiative, on support to women and families.

54. Although the world remains on track to reach the international target for safe drinking water, it represents a significant challenge in terms of future resource requirements. South Asia has made rapid progress but continues to have the largest population without access to facilities. The lowest coverage levels continue to be in sub-Saharan Africa, despite recent progress there. Meanwhile, action on sanitation

has stalled in most developing regions. More than a dozen countries in Asia and Central America now have to implement arsenic detection and mitigation programmes. Major water and sanitation interventions have also been necessary in several crisis situations, in response to conflicts and floods.

55. There is an urgent need for increased access to improved water and sanitation systems to control waterborne diseases that undermine child survival and development, reduce productivity and raise health care costs and to reduce the burdens that fall particularly on girls and women. Substantial efforts are needed for the scaling-up of locally planned interventions for poor families; community-based hygiene improvement and water safety; and strengthened sector plans, policies and budgets for hygiene, sanitation and water supply.

## B. Providing quality education

56. The Millennium Development Goals promise to give all children a full primary education by 2015, and "A world fit for children" adopted targets explicitly designed to help achieve this. Problems such as armed conflict, child labour, child trafficking and HIV/AIDS create serious impediments. However, investing in basic education is clearly a major preventive measure against HIV/AIDS and child labour and is central to winning the fight against poverty.

57. The Millennium Development Goals challenge countries to achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women. Corresponding targets require that by 2015 all children should be able to complete a full course of primary schooling, and that gender disparities be eliminated in primary and secondary education by 2005. Despite progress in some regions, an estimated 115 million primary school-age children, including 62 million girls, were out of school in 2001. The bulk of the children live in South Asia or sub-Saharan Africa, but countries in other regions also have significant pockets where outcomes are poor in terms of enrolment, completion and educational achievement.

58. Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, in particular, face an uphill task to get enrolment on track for achieving the 2015 goal. Enrolment growth rates need to be strong enough to overtake increases in the school-age population, to compensate for the over-aged children still enrolled in primary schools and to cope with the impacts of poverty, child labour, poor health and nutrition, and HIV/AIDS, which lead to irregular attendance and dropping out. While some countries have made commendable progress in enrolment growth rates in the past 20 years, they would need to improve that performance by up to 3 times over the next 10 years. Increases in girls' enrolment will need to be even greater. For those countries and regions on track for achieving access and parity goals, a heightened focus will be needed on issues of quality and equality.

59. Even where enrolment is generally high and gender gaps are low, as in Latin America and the Caribbean, repetition and dropout rates are often significant owing to poor quality education, classroom-level discrimination and weak public school systems. At least 55 countries are taking specific measures to boost girls' progression to post-primary education. Nevertheless, factors such as sexual exploitation, violence and lack of post-school opportunities continue to present obstacles.

60. Although in some countries boys are disadvantaged in terms of dropout rates and learning achievement, it is mainly girls who are disadvantaged — both as a group and as a subgroup of the disadvantaged, such as rural poor, ethnic minorities and indigenous populations. For all of the groups, disadvantage begins in the early years. These children are more likely to start school later than the prescribed age, less likely to be developmentally ready or well prepared for school and more prone to drop out or fail to achieve in school.

61. The Millennium Summit and the special session on children aspired to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005. However, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that 76 countries are likely to miss reaching gender parity at the primary and secondary levels by 2005. Increases in enrolment have not necessarily been accompanied by reductions in the gender gap. UNICEF estimates that while the ratio of girls' to boys' gross enrolment increased from 86 per cent to 92 per cent in developing countries during the 1990s, girls' primary school completion rates still lagged behind those of boys by almost 10 per cent in 2002. That highlights the importance of targeted interventions to address the specific factors affecting the education of girls.

62. Advocacy on Education for All and the urgency of the target for gender parity in basic education by 2005 have helped to create a climate for action in most regions. Some 79 countries now have national plans relating to Education for All that include explicit measures to reduce the number of out-of-school girls. Those measures are helping to boost access through interventions ranging from advocacy and the provision of school meals and classroom materials to intersectoral efforts that incorporate health, nutrition, water and sanitation and sometimes protection initiatives in schools.

63. Meanwhile, the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative is providing a basis for greater strategic focus in building alliances for girls' education. Regional focal points and a global advisory committee have been set up, and a work plan has been developed that commits partners to working on specific tasks. The Education for All — Fast Track Initiative, launched by the World Bank in 2002, has also helped to increase the focus on disparities in dropout and completion rates.

64. The most widespread gains in enrolment and gender parity have generally come about through mainstreaming efforts or through large-scale campaigns, such as "back-to-school" programmes in post-conflict situations. In other cases, such gains have been associated with major policy changes such as the abolition of school fees.

65. The assessment of progress in improving the quality of education has been hampered by a lack of widely used indicators. There remains a need for a comprehensive strategy for the monitoring and assessment of education quality. At the policy level, there is now greater emphasis on conditions that are likely to contribute to quality improvements, such as gender-sensitive curricula and teaching methods, adequate learning materials in both regular and post-crisis situations, clean water and sanitation facilities in schools and the promotion of hygiene and life skills education. About 41 countries have adopted a "child-friendly" package approach which promotes physical improvements in schools together with the training of teachers and such interventions as school meals.

## C. Protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence

66. An estimated 300 million children worldwide are subjected to violence, exploitation and abuse, including the worst forms of child labour; violence and abuse in communities, schools, institutions and workplaces or during armed conflict; and such harmful practices as female genital mutilation or cutting and child marriage. During armed conflict and natural disasters, and in areas where HIV/AIDS is prevalent, children deprived of or separated from their families become especially vulnerable to such practices. Children in institutions also frequently face adverse conditions.

67. Conflicts have continued to create large numbers of refugee and internally displaced children whose human rights, including the right to survival, are put at great risk. Globally, poverty and family breakdown still leave many millions of children living on the streets, working in hazardous occupations, exposed to violence and abuse or deprived of access to education. The growing numbers of HIV/AIDS orphans puts many more children at risk of child labour or in need of alternative forms of family care.

68. The most prominent gaps in protecting children worldwide are in the following areas: sexual abuse and exploitation, including in armed conflict; the use of children as soldiers; trafficking; hazardous work; harmful practices; and the situation of children not in the care of their families or in conflict with the law.

69. As the prevalence and severity of child protection issues have become better known, Governments have responded by ratifying human rights conventions and making a commitment to new standards, such as the optional protocols addressing trafficking, child prostitution and child pornography, and children in armed conflict. Countries continue to commit themselves to improved international standards for child protection.

70. Substantial progress has been made in the adoption by Governments of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. International Labour Organization Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour had been ratified by 156 countries by July 2005, an increase of 41 since 2001.

71. Progress is especially apparent in the reform of juvenile justice systems, although custodial sentencing continues to be too heavily used as a response to children in conflict with the law. More than 80 countries have adopted specific action plans and concrete programmes to address child labour. Progress on the review and strengthening of legal standards to protect children from violence has been encouraging, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe and in Latin America and the Caribbean. Guidelines have also been developed on justice in matters involving child victims and witnesses of crime.

72. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNICEF have collaborated to ensure the consideration of child protection in peacekeeping missions. Those offices and agencies, the World Bank, the International Labour Office and non-governmental organizations have also supported the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers in several countries. Work has been stepped up to protect women and children from sexual violence in emergencies, including through the training of humanitarian workers and the establishment of procedures for the reporting of abuse.

73. United Nations agencies and other partners have continued to work with Governments and civil society to generate support for laws and systems that protect children. Those partnerships have helped strengthen both the provision of preventive and protective services — for example, by the reform of juvenile justice systems — and community-led efforts to keep children safe. Such efforts have helped to establish a more protective environment in some countries and need to be pursued more widely.

74. Growth in information, combined with continued advocacy for policy reform, has helped to raise awareness of violence against and exploitation and abuse of children. With it has come increased political will to act, as seen in the response to the Indian Ocean tsunami. Global initiatives, such as the mid-term review of the outcomes of the second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Yokohama, Japan, in 2001, based on regional consultations and with the involvement of young people, and the United Nations Study on Violence against Children have also increased attention to child protection.

75. Birth registration rates have risen sharply in parts of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. New legislation and measures to reduce the costs to parents have contributed to a greater demand for birth registration. However, stronger partnerships are needed to build capacity in the civil administration systems on which sustained birth registration depends.

76. Intercountry cooperation and the involvement of groups, such as parliamentarians, can be effective in tackling such sensitive issues as cross-border trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. However, the incorporation of child protection in wider development frameworks has not been extensive enough, owing in part to a lack of attention to the wider concerns of the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

## D. Combating HIV/AIDS

77. The Millennium Development Goals articulated the global commitment to halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015. Almost all affected or vulnerable countries are now implementing plans and programmes to meet that commitment. Despite those efforts, many affected people, including children, have yet to receive the attention they need in AIDS-specific and related initiatives and in funding mechanisms.

78. The impact of HIV/AIDS is devastating and is likely to get worse. In 2004, 40 million people were living with HIV/AIDS. Of those, 2.2 million were children under 15. In addition, some 510,000 children below 15 years of age died of AIDS, and 640,000 were newly infected with HIV, mostly through a failure to prevent mother-to-child transmission. Between 2001 and 2003, the number of children estimated to have been orphaned by AIDS rose from 11.5 to 15 million. By 2010, the number of children orphaned by AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa alone is projected to exceed 18 million. The epidemic is also increasing in intensity in other regions, including South and East Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and Eastern Europe.

79. In the worst-affected countries in sub-Saharan Africa, children's lives are being radically worsened by the impact of HIV/AIDS on their families and communities and on education, health care, food security and welfare systems.

Many millions of adolescents are at risk and vulnerable to HIV infection as they approach adulthood. In regions where prevalence is still low and/or concentrated in specific areas or population groups, the challenge is to halt the epidemic before it spreads to the general population.

80. Increasingly, the face of HIV/AIDS is young and female. Women and girls now account for half of all people infected with HIV. The numbers are likely to rise since biological and social factors make them more vulnerable to infection than men or boys. Poverty, gender inequality and exploitation are at the root of those vulnerabilities.

81. Where HIV/AIDS is declining, it is primarily because young people have learned to practice safe behaviours. Responses are increasingly focused on meeting young people's needs for appropriate information, skills and services. A number of countries are now developing or have national strategies in place for preventing HIV among young people. A key challenge is often to ensure that young people are reached early in adolescence and that skills development continues through to young adulthood. Rapid expansion of appropriate life skills-based education is a priority.

82. At the end of 2004, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) reported that less than 1 per cent of adults were utilizing voluntary counselling and testing services in the 73 countries most affected by AIDS, that fewer than 10 per cent of pregnant women had access to effective services for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission and that less than 3 per cent of orphans and vulnerable children were receiving adequate support. This picture gives some indication of how far the global fight still has to go.

83. In 2004, the WHO/UNAIDS 3 by 5 Initiative provided the impetus for greatly increased access to treatment and could remove many barriers to future prevention, such as stigma and lack of access to HIV testing. There was a significant increase in the availability of funds from such sources as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; the President of the United States of America's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief; and the World Bank Multi-Country AIDS Programme. Several United Nations agencies provided technical assistance for the development of funding proposals and, in some cases, procurement services. Nonetheless, country proposals need to do more to encourage attention to affected or vulnerable children and adolescents.

84. To date, an estimated 89 countries have adopted national strategies for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS; 79, for school-based life skills education; and 47, for the protection and care of orphans and vulnerable children. While progress has been encouraging, greater efforts are still needed, including in countries with low prevalence. A further key challenge is to ensure that successful interventions are in fact implemented on a national scale. In 2003, only 2 per cent of HIV-positive women identified through prevention programmes received antiretroviral treatment. Only a very limited number of children in poor countries have access to cotrimoxazole to prevent common infections.

85. There is also increasing awareness of the importance of nutrition for children infected by HIV, with wider development of policies and guidelines on infant feeding and measures to ensure that HIV-positive women receive support in using safe child-feeding options. Nutritional security initiatives for children affected by HIV/AIDS are also being supported by the United Nations in selected countries,

including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP).

86. Support for orphans and vulnerable children and for the families and communities that provide the immediate response is still reaching only limited numbers. Greater attention to these children is needed in most national development plans. In 2004, 16 African countries and international partners undertook planning exercises to expand interventions and funding. The global partners forum on orphans and vulnerable children, convened by the World Bank and UNICEF, provides a mechanism for tracking responses and for coordinated action on such issues as removal of financial barriers to schooling.

87. To promote harmonization, effective use of resources, rapid action and results-based management, the "three ones" principles were adopted by developing countries and key partners in 2004. The principles call for support of one national plan, one coordinating mechanism and one monitoring and evaluation system in each country. United Nations country theme groups are working with other partners to put the principles into effect. There has been progress in establishing indicators, and approximately 74 countries now have monitoring mechanisms in place or under development.

88. The partners in the fight against AIDS face strategic challenges in deploying available resources to curb the spread of the epidemic among children and adolescents while at the same time providing care, support and treatment to those already affected. Overall, since the special sessions of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS and on children, there has been stronger leadership at all levels, and new resources have been mobilized. Access to antiretroviral treatment has become an international priority, although preventing and addressing paediatric AIDS remain a major challenge. The progress achieved still pales in comparison with the epidemic's spread and impact, especially on children and young people.

## IV. Ways forward

89. The United Nations special session on children adopted a set of goals that complement and strongly reinforce the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, bringing more specificity to the actions that are needed to achieve them. The updated analysis of progress in the present report suggests that most of the goals of "A world fit for children" will be achieved only through a major intensification of action for disadvantaged children and families across the world.

90. During the three years since the special session, there have been numerous but often isolated examples of rapid progress in individual countries and in regions. The examples demonstrate that accelerated progress is possible but also that current efforts need to be expanded and better supported by resource allocations, and at the political level.

91. Of the 190 countries that adopted "A world fit for children", at least 172, subsequently joined by Timor-Leste, have now taken or foresee taking action to operationalize its goals. Of those, some 114 have opted for national plans of action or policies specifically for children, while others have incorporated the goals, to a greater or lesser extent, in macroplanning or sectoral planning instruments. Many of

the plans of action, however, have yet to fully develop linkages to national budgeting, implementation and monitoring mechanisms.

92. The goals of "A world fit for children" are benefiting from the widespread support among Governments and international agencies for the goals adopted at the Millennium Summit, since the two are mutually enhancing. However, the lack of inclusion of child protection targets in the Millennium Development Goals continues to pose the challenge of ensuring that this priority area is appropriately considered in macrolevel plans, including in poverty reduction strategies. The plans should take account of the ways in which the protection of children affects the fulfilment of human rights and of how an insufficient focus on addressing such problems as child trafficking, child labour and violence against children is likely to hinder progress in national development significantly.

93. Much work remains to be done in order to ensure adequate and sustained national budget allocations for children, supplemented by donor assistance where needed. Countries with poverty reduction strategies and national development plans generally have well elaborated budgets, and those instruments provide an important means for directing resources to programmes that benefit children.

94. In many countries, the implementation of programmes for children will continue to be a challenge owing to weaknesses of institutional capacity in addition to budgetary constraints and, in a number of cases, conflict and instability. Among the possible ways forward are the establishment of high-level national councils for children, capacity-building of national children's agencies and collaboration with parliamentarians and civil society organizations in the promotion of child-focused budgets. Some of the most notable successes have been at subnational levels. Strengthening local government agencies can assist in the development, implementation and monitoring of child-centred programmes and can lead to greater integration and relevance of efforts as well as to local mobilization.

95. The more inclusive processes that have been used in the initial follow-up to the special session on children have resulted in a greater sense of ownership by civil society organizations and in the expectation that they will continue to be involved in subsequent phases. High priority should be given to developing structures and processes for facilitating the ongoing involvement of civil society — including children and young people — as a key part of the effort to mobilize society's resources to fulfil the rights of children.

96. Especially innovative has been the recognition of children and young people as a major constituency, in addition to their involvement in many government-led decision-making processes. During the period since the special session, activities undertaken by and with children and young people have proliferated. Those trends have also increased the need for adequate support and standards for the continued participation of children in reviews of progress.

97. Building on the efforts already made by Governments, regular reporting to the public on progress towards the goals of the United Nations Millennium Declaration and of "A world fit for children" should be ensured as an important means of social mobilization for development and as a way to strengthen accountability. In addition, civil society and community groups could be helped to generate information in specific areas, such as on the protection and care of children orphaned owing to AIDS. Greater emphasis should also be placed on the generation and use of data that

is disaggregated by gender, location and other key variables in order to address disparities and support local follow-up actions.

98. Regional mechanisms are playing an important role in maintaining political support for the goals of the special session on children and in monitoring progress across countries through peer reviews. The mechanisms could be further used to facilitate the intercountry exchange of experience and good practices in child-related programmes.

99. At the international level, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has the potential to promote a closer linkage between follow-up on the special session goals, the Millennium Development Goals and periodic reports by State parties on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Use should be made of the Committee's concluding observations on State party reports to maintain government and public mobilization with respect to the goals for children. The United Nations system should continue to assist Member States in their follow-up to the Observations where required.

100. "A world fit for children", the outcome document adopted at the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, and subsequent resolutions have called on the Secretary-General to report regularly to the Assembly on progress in implementing the Declaration and Plan of Action contained in that document. A further update on progress will, accordingly, be provided to the Assembly in 2006, leading up to a more detailed report and analysis to be presented to the commemorative plenary meeting to be scheduled for 2007. The review process leading to the detailed report will be based on national sources, and all countries will be requested to hold a participatory review with stakeholders and provide a progress report in standardized format before the end of 2006.

101. The United Nations system remains committed to providing support to national and regional initiatives where required. UNICEF will continue to work closely with Governments and with other United Nations and international partners, including for the collection and dissemination of information on progress and experience gained in the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action of "A world fit for children".